ACC/FAA BEST PRACTICES

FOREWORD

At their Management Workshop in July 1999, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Airport Consultants Council (ACC) representatives reported on the results of a survey taken within their respective organizations. The results of that survey emphasized the necessity for both groups to mutually address both the positive and negative findings and to seek improved ways to conduct our airport business. A Task Force was established with three members each from the two organizations and, in September 2000, the group formalized a list of "best practices". They defined a **"best practice"** as an ACC / FAA opportunity to improve a business activity or performance of the airport planning and development program.

Recognizing that each business situation between an FAA employee and an ACC consultant might require a different approach depending on the circumstances, the Task Force has emphasized that the list should not be understood as mandates. In addition, while some of the items are stated in ways that appear to apply to either a consultant or an FAA representative, many or most apply equally. Finally, it is important to note that there are other parties involved in this process. While this document focuses on FAA and the consultant community, the airport sponsor is the primary "customer" who is being served and is therefore an important participant as well.

The Task Force was very much aware that the state aviation departments are also key participants, particularly those in the Block Grant Program. Depending on the state, these departments may also provide much of the guidance and review normally provided by the FAA, though the extent and depth depend on the size and experience of their respective professional staffs. Suffice it to say, the best practices set forth here are equally applicable to a state agency when acting to fulfill FAA's role vis-à-vis a sponsor or consultant, even though the state may not be specifically cited in the text.

Subsequent to the drafting of this document, members of the ACC Board of Governors and FAA's regional Division Managers were asked to comment and make suggestions. The "final" list, therefore, is being presented by ACC and FAA as a document that both groups endorse for the positive contribution that its use can make in better serving the airports element of the National Aviation System.

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is responsible for establishing national standards for the design, construction and operation of a national system of airports that is safe and meets the needs of the users of the system. The owners and operators of the nation's public use airports look to the FAA for guidance in complying with those standards, and for grants to help meet their airports' capital needs. To obtain this guidance and assistance, the airport sponsors rely on FAA's regional airports divisions and their district offices (ADOs) and on airport consultants.

The Airport Consultants Council (ACC) is the professional association of consultants that develop airports, including planners, environmentalists, architects, and engineers. These consultants provide technical advice and services to sponsors concerning the development, improvement and expansion of airports in compliance with FAA standards. These consultants are, by and large, very knowledgeable and expert in FAA standards and requirements. Accordingly, FAA relies on them to provide advice to the airport sponsors, even though responsibility for approving the compliance of completed work with FAA standards finally rests with the FAA airports offices.

To provide "quality" service to airport sponsors, the ACC and the FAA airports field organizations need to recognize and understand each other's roles. These two groups have compiled a listing of "best practices" which can provide:

*   More effective relationships between airport consultants and the FAA;
*   Higher quality products;
*   More efficient and effective efforts by FAA and airport consultants;
*   More efficient and effective use of airport funds;
*   Better service and increased customer satisfaction.

Because the interaction between the FAA and a consultant may vary during different stages of the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) process, the best practice opportunities are identified within each major stage: Planning, Design, Project Formulation and Grant Administration, and Conflict Resolution. Common to all activities and perhaps most important of all are the personal relationships that exist among and between the individuals. This element, therefore, heads the list.

I. RELATIONSHIPS

*   Show mutual professional respect.
*   Engage in initial, ongoing, and open communication.
*   Develop forthright, realistic and timely dealings.
*   Show patience and flexibility when discussing differences.
*   Meet professional and project commitments.

II. PLANNING PRACTICES

- "Plan first; program second." Do not anticipate the results of your planning at the outset.
- Use phased planning and/or phased environmental projects for complex programs.
- Utilize more "out-of-the-box" thinking to create a work program that is specific to the project.
- Prepare for the planning by developing a complete understanding of available information and the issues <u>before</u> a scoping meeting.
- Spend the time to participate in scoping meetings to help define the planning project requirements and parameters.
- Accomplish planning and environmental analysis concurrently, if possible: don't wait until the planning process is completed to consider environmental factors.
- For any project, develop an up-front and agreed-upon scope, schedule and organizational chart to establish responsibilities and accountability by the sponsor, the consultant, FAA and other affected agencies.
- Include an appropriate level of engineering analysis in planning processes to assure that the plan can be implemented.
- To minimize duplicate work and expense, and to account for cumulative impacts, scope environmental projects to encompass future (five years, for example) as well as immediate development, where feasible and practical.
- Establish concurrence and/or resolve differences at "client group" meetings <u>before</u> advisory meetings or public presentations.
- Make user-friendly presentations tailored to the audience.
- Meet schedule commitments and expectations for quality documents and reviews.

III. DESIGN PRACTICES

- Hold pre-design meetings after sufficient preliminary data is available to allow discussion about specific project issues.
- Develop a project schedule and incorporate commitments to deadlines for critical milestones in the process.
- Where certification is to be accepted and regional procedures require FAA authorization to proceed to bid, promptly issue an authorization letter.
- Consultants and the FAA should interact with each other during the design process to avoid any "surprises" at the end of the process.
- Develop designs that are realistic and based on acceptable demand forecasts.
- Move ahead with scope and design only after coordination has taken place between consultant, sponsor, state and the FAA.
- Utilize available cost data on similar and recent projects to improve engineering cost estimates.
- Schedule final inspections in consultation with each other to insure participation by the sponsor, consultant and, where appropriate, the FAA or the state.

IV. PROJECT FORMULATION AND GRANT ADMINISTRATION

- Accept development in the Airport Capital Improvement Plan (ACIP) as the cornerstone of all AIP and PFC investment decisions.
- Where possible, seek to consolidate projects to achieve cost-effective development, reduce grant administration tasks and professional services, and provide the opportunity for reasonable, all encompassing construction bids.
- Use responsible preliminary cost estimates because they can provide the basis for programming projects:
    - -- Include consultants in the cost estimating process early.
    - -- Ensure master plan cost estimates for the 0 to 5-year period are realistic.
- Support "Design Only" grants for projects where cost effective and where development funding is anticipated in the subsequent year or years.
- Use scoping meetings to formulate projects: include key stakeholders and allow adequate time for discussion to confirm agreement on project goals or the process to be followed.
- Establish realistic schedules to make it possible for the FAA and the consultant to deliver on the commitments.
- Promise the client only what can be reasonably delivered and be prepared to fulfill that promise.
- Where an independent fee review is being conducted, include the independent reviewer in the scoping process.
- For projects that will involve other elements of the FAA such as air traffic, airway facilities and flight procedures, ask the Airports Division or ADO to coordinate a meeting of the affected elements to provide early input so that the projects can proceed expeditiously.
- Submit data to correspond with the information and format requested on the FAA application forms.
- Support an efficient close-out process in order to assure that projects are closed out promptly after project completion.

V. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Airport planning, design, construction and consultant performance standards are not always so "black and white" as to preclude honest professional differences in interpretation. Clearly there is no magic formula to resolve such differences other than honest and open efforts to discuss and communicate among and between the parties involved. To that end, all are encouraged to:

- Make your position and the reasoning for it clear.
- Take the time to become educated on the importance of the issue.
- Confine discussions to the technical issues and avoid purely personal differences.
- Give a "heads up" if the question needs elevation to another level.

If honest efforts to resolve the differences at the local level fail, the FAA, the sponsor or the consultant may, within their own organizations, on their own initiative, or at the request of the other:

- Advance the issue first to a regional resource specialist and/or to the next level in the consultant's firm.
- Advance it next to an ADO or Regional Manager depending on the circumstance.
- Advance to FAA Washington headquarters, but only where every effort to resolve it within the region has been exhausted.

In matters of consultant or FAA performance (quality, timeliness), it is important that such issues be addressed openly and honestly early on. If informal resolution cannot be achieved locally, it may be necessary to advance such issues to consultant/sponsor/Regional/ADO management to assure appropriate corrective action.

VI. CONCLUSION

As indicated in the Introduction, carrying out these best practices depends to a large degree on the quality of the relationships among those involved. It is important therefore to nurture open and continuous communication among the principal participants: the FAA, the sponsors and their consultants, and state aviation agencies. Finally, as our system of airports continues to mature and the professionals in this segment of the aviation community continue to gain experience, the list of "best practices" set forth here can very likely be refined and improved. Accordingly, suggestions through the respective organizations, ACC or FAA, are invited.